



The Trump administration has finally waived the Jones Act for Puerto Rico. Good.

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The White House announced Thursday that it is waiving a 97-year-old regulatory law for Puerto Rico requiring that goods shipped between U.S. ports be carried by U.S.-built vessels crewed by U.S. citizens.

The Jones Act, named for its author, the late Sen. Wesley Jones, R-Wash., is being lifted following outcry from critics who said keeping it in place could slow Hurricane Maria relief efforts.

"At [Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rossello's] request, [President Trump] has authorized the Jones Act be waived for Puerto Rico. It will go into effect immediately," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said Thursday morning on social media.

Rossello confirmed separately that he lobbied the White House personally to have the statute lifted for Puerto Rico.

"Yesterday night, I petitioned the White House for a temporary waver [sic] of the Jones Act," he announced on Twitter.

The administration originally declined the waiver because it had made the determination that getting goods shipped to the island wasn't a problem. The problem, they claimed, was dispersing goods *around* the island.

"The fuel supply challenges facing Puerto Rico are not a function of the lack of fuel being shipped to the island, but caused by the devastation to Puerto Rico's transportation networks that have prevented fuel from being transported on the island to all of the places that need it," DHS spokesman David Lapan told the Wall Street Journal.

As we noted yesterday: The only open port in the unincorporated U.S. territory is in San Juan, and it's clogged right now with relief aid. Any additional deliveries would either further overwhelm first responders or sit idly in the water until it can be unloaded eventually, according to those leading the rescue efforts. Worse, they added, they're running out of room at the ports, and fast.

Customs and Border Protection spokesman Greg Moore told Reuters this week that, "The limitation is going to be port capacity to offload and transit, not vessel availability."

In San Juan, for example, there are roughly 6,000 shipping containers filled with relief supplies, including medicine, food, and water, but they're not being moved out due to a combination of diesel fuel shortages, a lack of drivers and infrastructure damage.

As several critics rightly noted, the administration waived the Jones Act for Texas, Louisiana, and Florida following Hurricanes Irma and Harvey. So why not Puerto Rico?

Administration officials argued this week that they waived the law for mainland states so that fuel could be moved quickly and easily along the East Coast after hurricanes knocked out pipelines. Federal officials also explained this week that the post-Hurricane Maria situation in Puerto Rico is a different problem requiring different solutions, and that waiving the Jones Act could actually cause more harm than good as port capacity has become a real issue.

On Thursday, however, the White House reversed course and agreed that the nearly 100-year-old law should be lifted for Puerto Rico.

A good step in the right direction, but the administration shouldn't stop there: It should kill this law.

The Jones Act has been an outrageous financial burden on the people of Puerto Rico, and it needs to go. No time like the present.

"Puerto Rico's port problems/limitations are no reason to keep the Jones Act," the Cato Institute's Scott Lincicome explained this week. "[T]hey are separate bottlenecks; both need fixing."

"[O]nce ports are fixed, competition & supplies resulting from [Jones Act] waiver/peal would benefit PR long-term BUT political [opportunity] may be gone. Even *if* the benefits are small/remote, waiver (at least) is *literally costless* for the fedgov (only political cost). So why not do it?" he asked.

True. There is basically no cost to repealing the law – outside of angering special interest groups, of course.

"Problem [with] waiting for ports to unclog is that political urgency may have dissipated. Needs to happen NOW, or PR cld get stuck [with] high costs," Lincicome added.

He is right. Puerto Rico has suffered this relic of protectionism long enough. Congress should bury this law and never speak its name again.